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PRESS RELEASE

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JAPANESE AND AUSTRALIAN ORGANISATIONS CALL ON UN TO INCLUDE EAST TIMORESE IN TALKS

Members of the Japanese Diet and the Australian Council for Overseas Aid today called on the UN Secretary General to include nationalist representatives in talks to resolve the conflict in the disputed territory of East Timor.

The call was made during the Special Committee on Decolonisation's hearings on East Timor, in response to statements by Mr Xanana Gusmao, the military leader of the East Timorese resistance movement, Falintil, in which he emphasised his willingness to participate in negotiations.

"The United Nations must not forget any party which has a strong interest in solving this problem," Mr Gusmao said in his most recent message smuggled out of East Timor to Japan. "The inhabitants of East Timor must be considered to be such a party. It is therefore most important that representatives of the East Timorese sit at the conference table. Only when East Timorese representatives are seated at the conference can negotiations acquire international recognition and legitimacy. We will never abandon our position on dialogue," Mr Gusmao said. "We are prepared to discuss all issues which will lead to the solution of the problem. We are trusting the UN General Secretary to convene a meeting of all parties concerned."

Mr Gusmao's statement was presented to the UN Committee by Mr Kan Akatani representing the Japanese Diet Members Forum on East Timor and the Free East Timor Japan Coalition, a grouping of Japanese non governmental organisations concerned about the ongoing military conflict and human rights problems in East Timor.

"We intend to keep on calling on the Government to continue working actively to have all parties concerned to participate ... as in the case of Cambodia," Mr Akatani told the Special Committee on behalf of the 92 Japanese politicians who make up the Diet Members Forum.

Mr Akatani emphasised that the Japanese Government had expressed its concerns about human rights violations in East Timor to the Indonesian Government and reminded Special Committee members that the Prime Minister of Japan, Mr Kaifu, had announced four criteria regarding implementation of his country's Official Development Assistance (ODA), of which Indonesia is the primary recipient. The new criteria are "military spending, arms

export and import, possession and/or development of nuclear and bio-chemical weapons and degree of democratisation."

"The government intends to conduct more rigid evaluations of the recipient countries in respect to these criteria, and to reduce or even stop ODA to those countries whose military expenditure is outstanding or extraordinary, or which are against democratisation," Mr Akatani said.

"We believe that if these criteria are honestly applied to Indonesia, the number one recipient of Japan's ODA, discussion on the issue of East Timor will be inevitable. The Diet Members Forum will watch how this new policy is applied." He added that the government of Japan refused to accept the annexation of East Timor by Indonesia and considered the status of the territory as unsettled.

The Australian non-governmental proposal for UN sponsored talks on East Timor, presented to the Special Committee on behalf of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid by Ms Merrill Findlay, calls for UN convened round table discussions without pre-conditions on the future of East Timor. It specifically recommends that participants in the talks should include Mr Xanana Gusmao, representatives of the East Timorese political parties and Catholic Church clergy and representatives of the Indonesian and Portuguese governments. It also suggests a role for ASEAN in the talks process. This non-governmental proposal is expected to be adopted by member organisations of the newly formed International Federation for East Timor, as the basis of a global people's campaign to resolve the conflict in the former Portuguese territory.

In all 18 petitioners made presentations to the Special UN Committee over the two days of the hearings on East Timor, including a delegation of three parliamentarians from Portugal, representatives of Fretilin and UDT, Amnesty International, TAPOL, and petitioners from Japan, Canada, France, Holland, Britain and Australia.

For more information about the Australian talks proposal
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For more information about the Japanese proposal please contact IFET.